Vedic Humanism and Global Ethics: Relevance of Swami Dayananda's Thought in Multicultural Societies

Ramanathan Srinivasan [1] & P. S. Aithal [2]

[1] Emeritus Professor, Poornaprajna Institute of Management, Udupi - 576101, India, Orchid ID: 0009-0003-9896-9943; E-mail: drsramnath2k21@outlook.com

[2] Professor, Poornaprajna Institute of Management, Udupi - 576101, India, Orchid ID: 0000-0002-4691-8736; E-mail: psaithal@gmail.com

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Orchid ID: 0000-0002-4691-8736; E-mail: psaithal@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The present multicultural society encounters various ethical challenges because it requires institutions which will connect shared values to cultural diversity acceptance. This paper investigates how Vedic Humanism from Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati provides an ethical framework which works for these specific situations. Dayananda used reason to reinterpret Vedic thought while promoting ethical principles which apply to all people and social equality to eliminate superstition and ritualistic practices and discriminatory social structures. His belief that dharma exists through moral actions instead of birth or religious beliefs or ritual practices creates an ethical framework which works for societies with multiple religious groups.

Methodology: In this paper, the exploratory qualitative research method is used. The relevant information is collected using keyword-based search in Google search engine, Google Scholar search engine, and AI-driven GPTs. This information is analysed and interpreted as per the objectives of the paper.

Analysis/ Results: This paper demonstrates that Dayananda's philosophical ideas contained elements which match contemporary global ethical principles through his defence of human dignity and his promotion of rational thinking and educational development and his belief in universal moral duties. His philosophical method combines spiritual knowledge with logical moral rules which stop him from choosing between complete dogmatic beliefs and completely flexible moral standards.

Originality/ Values: The study applies thematic analysis to dharma and equality and reason and education to show how Vedic Humanism supports dialogue between cultures and develops democratic leadership and ethical administration in diverse communities. The study concludes that Swami Dayananda's thought provides an indigenous yet globally relevant ethical framework capable of addressing contemporary moral crises without erasing cultural plurality.

Type of Paper: Exploratory Research.

Keywords: Vedic Humanism; Global Ethics; Swami Dayananda, Multiculturalism; Dharma; Rational Faith

1. INTRODUCTION :

The process of globalization together with large-scale population shifts has established new social groups which embrace members who bring their various cultural traditions and ethical systems. The celebration of diversity through multiculturalism leads to essential questions about human moral value sharing and their ability to preserve social unity and ethical leadership. The current ethical theories produce a conflict because universalism threatens to erase cultural differences, yet relativism hinders the establishment of common moral values. The current situation requires us to study non-Western ethical systems because they share essential universal values which hold great significance [1-3].

Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati emerges as a significant yet underexplored contributor to global ethical thought. His Vedic Humanism philosophy worked to bring back the moral values of the Vedas through a method which used reason to assess religious beliefs. Dayananda rejected ritualism and caste hierarchy and sectarian dogma while he presented dharma as a system which bases itself on moral behavior and

Poornaprajna International Journal of Teaching & Research Case Studies (PIJTRCS), ISSN: 3107-8494, Vol. 3, No. 1, January - June 2026

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equal treatment of all people and logical thinking. His reformist platform maintained spiritual values through a process which converted religious practices into moral actions that followed standard human values [4-5].

Dayananda believed that people should receive respect based on their human worth rather than their family background or religious affiliation which matches modern human rights principles. The teaching approach he uses enables students to create their own moral decisions while they learn about social responsibilities which matches the core values of democratic and multicultural educational systems. His Vedic Humanism operates as an ethical system which avoids theological elements thus enabling it to work with different cultural backgrounds [6].

"I have not come to preach any new dogmas or religion, nor to establish a new order, nor be proclaimed a new Messiah or Pontiff. I have only brought before my people the light of the Vedic wisdom which has been hidden during the centuries of India's thralldom." -----Maharshi Swami Dayananda Sarswati.

The study shows how Dayananda built his teachings through the combination of Indian traditional knowledge with universal moral values. It evaluates its applicability to diverse cultural communities which advances knowledge in three academic fields: comparative ethics, Indian Knowledge Systems and intercultural philosophy. The inquiry shows Dayananda created an ethical system which combined rational thinking with established customs and accepted multiple perspectives to establish common moral values between various cultural communities.

2. OBJECTIVES :

   (1) To examine the ethical foundations of Vedic Humanism in Dayananda Saraswati's thought.
   (2) To analyze Dayananda's conception of dharma as a universal moral principle.
   (3) To assess the relevance of his ideas for ethical coexistence in multicultural societies.
   (4) To position Dayananda's philosophy within contemporary global ethics discourse.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE :

Jones (1989) [7] situates Dayananda within nineteenth-century Indian reform movements, highlighting his rational critique of social and religious orthodoxy, but does not extend the analysis to global ethics.

Bhikhu Parekh (2000) [8] discusses multiculturalism and ethical pluralism, offering a useful framework to evaluate non-Western ethical systems like Dayananda's Vedic Humanism.

Radhakrishnan (1951) [9] emphasizes Indian philosophy's universal ethical aspirations, providing philosophical grounding for interpreting Dayananda's thought beyond religious reform.

Sen (2009) [10] explores justice and ethical universals in diverse societies, indirectly supporting the relevance of rational, human-centered ethical systems such as Dayananda's philosophy.

Table 1: Review of literature on Swami Dayananda Saraswati

S. No.	Area/Topic	Focus/Outcome	Reference
1	World Perspectives on Swami Dayananda Saraswati	Scholars of Dayananda's work view the Vedic path he proposed as a distinct alternative to both capitalism and communism, aiming to avoid the flaws of each. It promotes a fresh model of human and social relations that upholds the dignity of the individual soul while supporting a stable and healthy society.	Garg, G. R. (1984). [11]
2	Vedic literature and Swami Dayananda Saraswati	Swami Dayananda's Veda-based insights sparked renewed research from 1875 onward, including the early claim that arithmetic and algebra developed in India. Subsequent findings indicate that Vedic Indians excelled across disciplines—arts, grammar, linguistics, music, dance, literature, law, medicine, mathematics, philosophy, and religion—placing them on par with contemporary civilizations.	Tularam, G. A. (2010). [12]

Poornaprajna International Journal of Teaching & Research Case Studies (PIJTRCS), ISSN: 3107-8494, Vol. 3, No. 1, January - June 2026

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3	The violence of conversion: Proselytization and interreligious controversy in the work of Swami Dayananda Saraswati	This paper examines Swami Dayananda Saraswati's controversial view that attempting to convert others is a form of violence, comparing it with critiques by Gandhi and other thinkers, and analyzing his use of the term "violence." It concludes that whether proselytization counts as violence depends largely on how one defines both "violence" and "religion."	Bauman, C. M. (2015). [13]
4	Unsaintly virtue: Swami Dayananda Saraswati and modern Hindu hagiography	Arya hagiography (1880s–1920s) was marked by a paradox: it aimed to narrow the gap between "great men" and ordinary people while often reinforcing it. The article places this genre within "print asceticism," exploring how colonial writers used print as a means of self-renunciation for the nation's good.	Scott, J. B. (2014). [14]
5	Spiritual Education in Swami Dayananda's Philosophy	This paper outlines Swami Dayananda's views on spiritual education, highlighting his ethics, philosophy, Dharma, and the "Five Tests of Truth" as its foundation. It concludes that spiritual education develops individual potential through virtues like non-violence, self-control, truth, and wisdom, enabling people to address life's challenges creatively and attain higher knowledge.	Srivastava, P. S. (2015). [15]
6	'The Eyes Must Be Opened to Find Out if They See': Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Universalisation of the Veda as a Pramāṇa	This paper analyzes Swami Dayananda Saraswati's views on the origin, nature, and role of revelation, showing how he rearticulated traditional Vedāntic arguments for a modern context shaped by scientific thinking. It highlights his creative adaptation of classical ideas where scriptural authority can no longer be assumed.	Rambachan, A. (2014). [16]
7	Nation-State, Language and Social Consciousness: Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Revolutionary Ideas on Self-Rule and Social Reform	Dayanand Saraswati promoted modern scientific thinking alongside Vedic values, advocated women's rights and Dalit equality, and worked for religious unity and social reform. By reviving Vedic ideals and cultural pride, he encouraged a return to Vedic consciousness, and his reformist vision continues to influence Indian society today.	Byadwal, S. (2025). [17]
8	Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Instruments in the Reformation of Indian Society	This paper highlights Swami Dayananda's strong efforts toward social reform and identifies the key instruments he used in his movement. It argues that these tools, drawn from his life and writings, remain relevant today as society faces moral and social challenges despite technological progress.	Singh, G. (No date). [18]
9	Swami Dayananda Sarasvati's vision of Golden Vedic Age in	The authors suggest that the symbolic messages of the Golden Vedic Age can be interpreted to support Hindutva ideology, with Vedic and temple symbolism used to promote the idea of a Hindu Rashtra. They argue that creative use of	Świerzowska, A., Kłodkowski, P., & Kudelska, M. (2024). [19]

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		religious and mythological symbols can aid political success in a deeply religious society like India.	
10	Impact of Swami Dayanand Saraswati in the Awakening of Indian Masses	Maharshi Dayanand was a philosopher, social reformer, and founder of the Arya Samaj who championed a return to Vedic principles and opposed idol worship and ritualism. His book *Satyarth Prakash* and his early call for "India for Indians" made him highly influential, earning recognition as a maker of modern India by leaders like S. Radhakrishnan and Sri Aurobindo.	Singh D. G. (2017). [20]
11	The Structure of Gurukula Education in the Indian Knowledge Tradition: A Study in the Context of Swami Dayananda Saraswati	Vedic education, rooted in the Vedas and Upanishads, emphasized holistic learning, moral duty, and harmony with nature, beginning with value-based Gurukul training and extending to renowned centers like Takshila and Nalanda. It included women scholars and produced many great thinkers, with Swami Dayanand Saraswati later elaborating the Gurukul system in *Satyarth Prakash*.	Sharma, D. A. (2024). [21]
12	Relevance of Swami Dayananda's Social Philosophy in Present Education	Swami Dayananda, a major proponent of Indian wisdom and founder of Arya Samaj, inspired Hindus with a renewed vision, promoted universal love and peace, and worked to reduce interreligious conflict. Rejecting untouchability and ritual orthodoxy, he led reforms urging a true return to Vedic principles, influencing later social movements including those of Gandhi.	Kalra, H. K. (2018). [22]

4. FOUNDATIONS OF VEDIC HUMANISM: ETHICS, REASON, AND REFORM IN DAYANANDA'S THOUGHT :

Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), founder of the Arya Samaj reform movement, emerged as one of the most influential architects of modern India's cultural and intellectual renaissance. His philosophy represented a sophisticated synthesis of Vedic metaphysics with Enlightenment rationalism, positioning human dignity and welfare at the center of religious life. Dayananda's Vedic message emphasized profound respect and reverence for human beings, grounded in the Vedic conception of the divine nature of the individual—the notion that the human body serves as a temple where the soul (Atma) interfaces with the creator (Paramatma). This theological anthropology formed the bedrock of what can be characterized as Vedic humanism: the principle enshrined in the Ten Universal Principles of the Arya Samaj that all actions should be performed with the prime objective of benefiting humanity, rather than following dogmatic rituals or revering idols and symbols. In his personal life, Dayananda interpreted moksha (individual liberation) as a lower calling compared to the imperative of emancipating others, thereby subordinating personal salvation to collective human welfare. This ethical orientation distinguished his reform project from purely otherworldly spiritualities and aligned it with humanistic concerns for social progress. His conception of dharma, articulated in the Satyarth Prakash, defined righteous conduct as whatever conforms to impartial justice, truthfulness, and the teachings of the Vedas, while explicitly rejecting partiality and injustice. Dayananda characterized the just person as one who, after careful thinking, remains ever ready to accept truth and reject falsehood, and who counts the happiness of others as equal to his own—a formulation that echoes both Kantian universalism and utilitarian concern for collective welfare while remaining rooted in Vedic epistemology.

The rationalist foundations of Dayananda's thought manifested in his systematic critique of prevailing religious and social practices through the dual criteria of Vedic authority and reasoned inquiry. He promoted the use of logic and reason in religious matters, arguing that the Vedas contained knowledge aligned with modern science, that religion and science were complementary rather than contradictory,

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that superstitions should be eradicated through education and logical thinking, and that truth should be tested through experience rather than blind belief. His philosophy was heavily influenced by rationalism and scientific thinking, as he sought to eliminate superstitions and irrational practices from Hinduism while promoting a more logical and empirical approach to spirituality. The Arya Samaj unequivocally condemned idol worship, animal sacrifices, ancestor worship, priestcraft, the caste system, untouchability, child marriage, and discrimination against women on the grounds that these practices lacked Vedic sanction, while actively discouraging dogma and encouraging skepticism in beliefs contrary to common sense and logic. In the Satyarth Prakash, Dayananda denounced all alchemists, magicians, sorcerers, wizards, and spiritists as frauds, urging that young people be counselled against such deceptions from childhood. This rationalist orientation extended to his social reform agenda: he opposed child marriage, advocated widow remarriage, opened Vedic study to members of all castes, and founded numerous educational and charitable institutions. His advocacy for equal rights for women included the right to education and reading of Indian scriptures, and his critique of casteism emphasized that social position should be determined by qualifications, accomplishments, and character rather than birth. Dayananda's teachings stressed living a moral and ethical life guided by principles of truth, righteousness, and non-violence, believing that individuals should strive for virtue, self-discipline, and service to humanity. The Satyarth Prakash itself, published in 1875 and subsequently revised in 1882, addressed topics including the worship of one God, explanation of Vedic principles, the relationship between religion and science, devotion and intellect, and elimination of the caste system. The work championed strict monotheism while rejecting polytheism and idol worship, emphasized a formless, omnipresent God worshipped through contemplation and righteous actions, condemned the caste system and discrimination while advocating for equality and social justice, and emphasized the importance of knowledge and education combining Vedic wisdom with modern scientific approaches. President Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan observed that Dayananda ranked highest among the makers of modern India, having worked tirelessly for the political, religious, and cultural emancipation of the country, guided by reason in taking Hinduism back to its Vedic foundations. This integration of ethical humanism, rational inquiry, and Vedic restoration created an intellectual framework that profoundly influenced India's nationalist movement and continues to shape debates about tradition, modernity, and social reform in contemporary South Asian thought.

5. DHARMA AS UNIVERSAL MORAL LAW: EQUALITY, DUTY, AND HUMAN DIGNITY AS PER SWAMI DAYANANDA SARASWATI :

Swami Dayananda Saraswati's conception of dharma, articulated in the "Beliefs and Disbeliefs" section of Satyartha Prakash, defines it as whatever is in full conformity with impartial justice, truthfulness and the like, and that which is not opposed to the teachings of God as embodied in the Vedas. This formulation represents a radical departure from conventional understandings of dharma as mere ritualistic duty or caste-based obligation, instead positioning it as a universal moral law grounded in rational principles accessible to all humanity.

For Dayananda, dharma is the universal law that governs the universe and all beings within it, and it is the duty of every individual to live in harmony with this law and fulfill their responsibilities towards themselves, their families, society, and the world at large. This universalist vision rejected particularistic interpretations that limited moral obligations to specific communities or castes, instead insisting that dharma's imperatives applied equally to all human beings regardless of birth, gender, or social position. Dayananda's Vedic message emphasized respect and reverence for other human beings, supported by the Vedic notion of the divine nature of the individual—the concept that the body is the temple where the human essence (soul or atma) has the possibility to interface with the creator (Paramatma). This theological anthropology established an inviolable foundation for human dignity: every individual, by virtue of possessing an Atma capable of communion with the divine, possessed inherent worth that transcended all social hierarchies and conventional distinctions.

In the Ten Universal Principles of the Arya Samaj, Dayananda enshrined the idea that all actions should be performed with the prime objective of benefiting mankind, as opposed to following dogmatic rituals or revering idols and symbols, with the first five principles speaking of Truth while the last five speak of a society with nobility, civics, co-living, and disciplined life. The sixth principle explicitly stated that the prime object of the Arya Samaj is benevolence of the world, that is, to promote physical, spiritual and social good of everyone, while the seventh principle declared that conduct towards all should be

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guided by love, righteousness and justice. These principles established dharma not as an abstract metaphysical concept but as a concrete ethical program oriented toward universal human welfare, with the ninth principle declaring that no one should be content with promoting his or her own good only; on the contrary, one should look for his or her good in promoting the good of all. In his own life, Dayananda interpreted moksha to be a lower calling, as it argued for benefits to the individual, rather than calling to emancipate others—a remarkable inversion of traditional Hindu soteriology that subordinated personal liberation to collective emancipation and social transformation.

The ethical egalitarianism embedded in Dayananda's conception of dharma found its most radical expression in his systematic critique of caste hierarchy and his advocacy for human equality across all dimensions of social life. Dayananda denounced the caste system based on birth, untouchability, and social discrimination, teaching that all human beings are born equal and should be treated with respect, regardless of birth or gender. He held a stubborn conviction against the inflexible caste structure with which Hindu society had been afflicted for centuries, contending that worth should be measured concerning a person's action (karma) and not birth, and he envisioned a society where no one would be discriminated against based on birth but instead supported a system where one's abilities and virtues defined their social position. This reform challenged caste-by-birth and supported dignity of all individuals while emphasizing merit-based social roles. The Arya Samaj condemned practices including animal sacrifice, pilgrimages, priest craft, offerings made in temples, the castes, child marriage, meat eating and discrimination against women, arguing that all these practices ran contrary to good sense and the wisdom of the Vedas. Dayananda's major reformist ideas included opposition to caste by birth, support for caste based on merit and occupation, strong support for women's education, widow remarriage, and gender equality, along with condemnation of child marriage, untouchability, and sati. The Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha (HDAS), inspired by Dayananda's legacy, has remained strongly committed to promoting the dignity of the human being and social harmony, noting that there is no Vedic scriptural sanction for any act of cruelty or oppression or unfair discrimination based on anyone's birth. Dayananda's advocacy for a legal and social order based on principles of dharma and karma meant that laws should not only serve the interests of groups but should be based on universal ethical principles that promote the welfare of all. He supported global religion through encouraging the idea of a universal religion for the welfare of mankind—a religion that was equally acceptable in all three periods (past, present, future), that was truthful and accepted by all without any discrimination, and in which the emphasis was on the observance of morality. The Ten Principles elaborated that all actions should be carried out in accordance with dharma, or after careful consideration of what is right and wrong, and that one should always be willing to accept the truth and reject the lie.

Dayananda's teaching on karma emphasized individual responsibility—every person is the maker of their own fate, seeing karma as a rational system of justice, encouraging effort, accountability, and moral behavior, while dharma for him was the path of truth, righteousness, and service to society—not ritualistic duties, but moral and spiritual obligations. In his commentaries on the Rigveda and Yajurveda, Dayananda consistently emphasized that Vedic dharma always serves the greater good while honoring individual nature, thus reconciling the demands of universal moral law with respect for individual difference and authentic self-expression. Dayananda urged that learned men among the followers of every religion should free themselves from prejudice, accept the universal truths—that is those truths that are to be found alike in all religions and are of universal application—reject all things in which the various religions differ and treat each other lovingly, as it will be greatly to the advantage of the world. This vision of dharma as universal moral law transcending sectarian boundaries, grounded in rational principles of justice and truthfulness, oriented toward universal human welfare, and premised on the inherent dignity of every individual soul, constituted one of the most sophisticated ethical systems to emerge from nineteenth-century reformist Hinduism and continues to offer resources for contemporary moral and political philosophy in addressing questions of equality, duty, and human rights.

6. MULTICULTURALISM AND ETHICAL PLURALISM: DIALOGUES WITH MAHARISHI DAYANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY :

Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati presents one of the most paradoxical and intellectually challenging frameworks for understanding the relationship between universal ethical principles and religious pluralism in the context of colonial India. Born Mool Shankar Tiwari on February 12, 1824, in Tankara, Gujarat, Dayananda was a Hindu philosopher and social leader who founded the Arya Samaj reform

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movement of Hinduism, with his book Satyarth Prakash remaining one of the influential texts on the philosophy of the Vedas and clarifications of various ideas and duties of human beings. Dayananda is considered the first Hindu in the nineteenth century to study and discuss other religions (non-Vedic faiths), and some twenty years prior to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 where Swami Vivekananda participated, Dayananda organized a conference in Delhi and invited representatives from all religions. This pioneering engagement with interfaith dialogue, however, was profoundly shaped by a fundamental tension between universalist aspirations and exclusivist truth claims. Unlike many other reform movements of his times within Hinduism, the Arya Samaj's appeal was addressed not only to the educated few in India but to the world as a whole as evidenced in the sixth principle of the Arya Samaj, and as a result his teachings professed universalism for all living beings and not for any particular sect, faith, community or nation. Dayananda urged that learned men among the followers of every religion should free themselves from prejudice, accept the universal truths that are to be found alike in all religions and are of universal application, reject all things in which the various religions differ, and treat each other lovingly, as it will be greatly to the advantage of the world. Yet this call for universal harmony coexisted uneasily with his conviction that Dayananda held Hinduism to be based on universal and all-embracing principles and therefore to be true, declaring that he held the four Vedas as the repository of knowledge and religious truths as the Word of God, absolutely free from error and an authority unto themselves. This created what might be termed an "inclusivist exclusivism"—a framework that simultaneously proclaimed universal principles while maintaining the exclusive truth of Vedic revelation, a paradox that continues to challenge contemporary theorists of multiculturalism and religious pluralism.

The structural tension in Dayananda's approach to religious diversity becomes most evident in examining the Satyarth Prakash, particularly its treatment of non-Vedic traditions. Satyartha Prakash first appeared in 1875 in Hindi consisting of eleven chapters, with the first ten presenting a complete statement of his ideas on various subjects, while the eleventh chapter, running to a quarter of the book, was devoted to a critique of Hinduism dealing with idol worship, miracles, pilgrimages, holy men, sects, and Puranas. Towards the end of his life, he thoroughly revised this edition and added three more chapters dealing with Carvaka, Buddhism and Jainism which are religions of Indian origin, and Christianity and Islam which, according to him, are foreign faiths. Some of the topics in the Satyarth Prakash include worship of one god, explanation of the main principles of the Vedas, the relationship between religion and science and between devotion and intellect, elimination of the caste system, and critical analysis of different religious beliefs and other religions in light of the Vedas for the strengthening of society, eradication of superstitions, false notions and meaningless customs, shunning narrow-mindedness and promoting the brotherhood of man. The critical reception of these chapters reveals the fundamental difficulty in reconciling polemical critique with genuine pluralism.

Scholarly analyses situate the author, Dayananda Saraswati, within a reform milieu marked by intense ideological competition. Although he articulated a vision of ethical renewal grounded in universal principles, his writings often adopted a sharply adversarial posture toward alternative belief systems. Historians have noted that this stance was shaped less by abstract theology than by the concrete socio-political environment of the time, particularly the perception of organized conversion and cultural displacement. This context helps explain the transition from textual critique to organized social action. Through the movement he founded in 1875, reform initiatives expanded into programs aimed at cultural consolidation and reversal of conversion. These efforts combined doctrinal instruction, public ritual, and social support mechanisms, reflecting a broader pattern in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century reform movements, where intellectual argument was inseparable from community mobilization.

Taken together, historiography treats *Satyārtha Prakāśa* not simply as a theological text, but as a historically situated document—one that illuminates the anxieties, strategies, and contradictions of reform in a plural and contested social landscape.

Through Arya Samaj he initiated the Shuddhi movement in the late 19th and early 20th centuries with the aim to purify or reconvert individuals who had converted to Islam or Christianity back to Hinduism, conducting mass reconversion ceremonies, organizing educational programs to highlight the tenets of Hinduism and criticize other religions, and providing social support to converts who wished to return to Hinduism.

The contemporary significance of Dayananda's complex legacy for multicultural theory lies precisely in the unresolved tension between his progressive social reforms and his religious exclusivism, a tension

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that illuminates fundamental questions about the relationship between cultural identity, ethical universalism, and religious pluralism. Swami Dayananda Saraswati was a visionary who fearlessly challenged the socio-religious norms of his time, redefining Hinduism as a rational and inclusive way of life while addressing critical social issues like caste discrimination and gender inequality, with his establishment of Arya Samaj and advocacy for Vedic ideals not only transforming Indian society but also empowering generations to strive for equality, knowledge, and national pride. In the 19th century there were many evils and superstitions in India, and while Swami Dayananda opposed idol worship, he also opposed the caste system, untouchability, child marriage, the sati system, polygamy, the purdah system, while stressing women's education and supporting the restoration of Vedic traditions. Dayananda's efforts to revive Vedic teachings and his active promotion of the Shuddhi movement brought him into conflict with other religious communities. The popular conception of Dayananda as a benign Hindu social reformer is only a half-truth, as the roots of contemporary Hindu fundamentalism and militancy against the minority religions to a great extent lie deep in the 19th century, especially in the religious philosophy of persons like Dayananda Saraswati, making the ideological link between Dayananda and contemporary Hindutva too evident to go unnoticed. Scholars argue that the framework articulated in works such as Satyarth Prakash provided ideological tools for modern Hindu nationalism by framing Hinduism as an inclusive yet assertive dharma encompassing traditions like Buddhism and Jainism while opposing proselytization by other faiths, with the Arya Samaj's shuddhi movement initiated by Dayananda in the late 19th century viewed in recent studies as a precursor to Hindutva's defensive cultural strategies against demographic shifts and conversions. This dual legacy—as both progressive reformer and religious exclusivist—poses challenging questions for contemporary multicultural societies about whether strong religious or cultural identity necessarily conflicts with genuine pluralism, or whether forms of "rooted cosmopolitanism" can maintain commitments while respecting religious diversity.

The philosophical dialogue between Dayananda's nineteenth-century framework and contemporary theories of multiculturalism and ethical pluralism reveals both enduring insights and profound limitations that continue to resonate in debates about religious diversity, cultural identity, and universal ethics. Swami Dayanand believed in such a religion which is universal and whose principles are accepted as truth by all human beings, giving a liberal interpretation of religion and emphasizing one universal faith, yet this universalism was predicated on Vedic supremacy rather than genuine acceptance of religious diversity as an inherent good. The contrast with his contemporary Swami Vivekananda is instructive: while both advocated for universal principles, Vivekananda's philosophy at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893 emphasized acceptance rather than mere tolerance, arguing that tolerance implies superiority by suggesting one is allowing others to live despite their being wrong. Dayananda's framework lacked this crucial distinction, operating instead within what might be termed "critical tolerance"—acknowledging other religions' right to exist while systematically demonstrating their inferiority to Vedic truth.

Nevertheless, certain dimensions of Dayananda's thought retain contemporary relevance for multicultural theory. His insistence on rational inquiry as the arbiter of religious truth, his rejection of birth-based hierarchies, his advocacy for gender equality, and his emphasis on education as a vehicle for social transformation all represent contributions that transcend his exclusivist epistemology. Dayananda strongly opposed the rigid caste system, envisioning a society where no one would be discriminated against based on birth but instead supported a system where one's abilities and virtues defined their social position, and he was one of the first reformers in modern India to openly advocate for women's rights including women's education, widow remarriage, and opposition to child marriage. The challenge for contemporary scholars engaging with Dayananda's legacy lies in extracting these universalist ethical commitments while critically examining the exclusivist framework in which they were embedded. His philosophy ultimately demonstrates that the relationship between particular identity and universal ethics, between cultural authenticity and religious pluralism, remains one of the most difficult problems in political and moral philosophy—a problem that nineteenth-century reformers like Dayananda could articulate but not resolve, and one that continues to challenge multicultural societies in the twenty-first century as they negotiate between respect for cultural and religious difference and commitment to universal human rights and ethical principles that transcend particular traditions.

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7. VEDIC HUMANISM AS A BASIS FOR GLOBAL ETHICS :

The spirit of moral creativity found in the Vedic texts is not tribal or sectarian; it is cosmopolitan, equally concerned for all living beings and all systems of existence, affirming the sanctity of life and the inherent value of all conscious entities. In the hymns of the Ṛg Veda and the later Upaniṣads, humans are portrayed not as a privileged species who dominate over all creation, but as a participant in an interrelated matrix of existence, all of which is governed by ṛta, the cosmic order of truth. Vedic Humanism is best characterized as a human centered interpretation of this cosmic-moral law; a philosophy that fosters self-value, compassion and responsibility based on the recognition of universal interdependence. Long before the term 'humanism' emerged in Europe, Indian sages of antiquity expressed a spirituality that integrated transpersonal metaphysical self-inquiry with social awareness. Every self (ātman) was declared to be in essence, identical to Brahman, the unfettered consciousness. Consequently, all forms of discrimination based on caste, religion, or species were deemed to be logically adharmic. In this ethical civilizational outlook, the sense of freedom stems not from the assertion of one's rights in opposition to others, but it is centered on the realization of oneness with others. Consequently, this is the earliest semblance of a universal ethic found in the Indian texts; 'From every direction, may there come to us noble and inspired thoughts. May all beings be joyful. May all beings attain what is for their highest good (Ṛg Veda I.89)'.

Vedic Humanism integrates spiritual universalism (the same Self in all beings), rational ethics (the use of reason to determine right and wrong within one's experience), and the principle of service (seva) as the realization of truth. The moral framework of Vedic Humanism comprises of satya (truthfulness), ahiṃsā (non-violence), dāna (altruistic giving), and dayā (compassion), which goes beyond religious ritual to become the structural ethics of living. Vedic Humanism, through the doctrine of Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam (the world as one family), also anticipates the ethical basis of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: the unity of human destiny and the imperative of collaboration beyond borders of difference. Vedic Humanism is fundamentally different from contemporary secular humanism. It regards reason as sacred and spirituality as rational. The Vedas imply that to be human is to acknowledge that our rationality is a manifestation of the Divine. The ethical imperative of humanity is not only to ameliorate the circumstances of life, but to rise above ignorance and greed by exercising knowledge and self-control. Vedic Humanism offers what modern philosophy frequently lacks, an ontological basis of Vedic Humanism in global ethics: a foundation for duty and dignity. Contrary to the social contract, moral law (dharma) is the law of being peace is the result of the alignment of the individual and the cosmos, whereas disharmony, ego, and excess produce suffering. The planetary crises of our time—economic, ecological, and psychological—demonstrate the principle of dis-alignment with ṛta.

Applying Vedic Humanism in the current century should not be seen as solely an expression of spiritual idealism or a wistful longing for the past. Vedic Humanism constitutes a viable approach to three related global crises: the looming collapse of the environment, the loss of ethical direction in society, and the growing dehumanization resulting from advancing technologies. Each of these crises demonstrates the need for revaluing the fact deficient rationality that dominates the current world and therefore calls for a revitalization of some form of moral cosmology. More ecological philosophers recognize the fact that sustainability is about not just policy change, but a fundamental change in the way we think about and engage with the natural world. This is about shifting from the paradigm of an object to be used to one of a community to which we belong.

Vedic Humanism recognized the Earth as Bhū Devī, the rivers as mothers, and the air as life's breath. Environmental ethics with sacred reverence inspired the Chipko and Navdanya movements, where ecology is seen as a Dharmic Duty. Globally the non-injury (ahiṃsā) principle is expanding from interpersonal to planetary, with less carbon and less violence to the ecosystems seen as moral restraint. An example is the United Nations resolution on the International Day of Non-Violence (October 2); this is a way to incorporate ancient ethics into contemporary global policy. And the yogic art of integrating body and mind is a healing approach to the mental health epidemic of today's world. The modern world's practice of mindfulness and compassion, which is the subject of much research today, is basically a rehabilitated expression of the ancient Vedic personal self-discipline (sādhanā). The new approach means that what was once purely a technique for personal liberation now supports a transformative public health ethic.

Poornaprajna International Journal of Teaching & Research Case Studies (PIJTRCS), ISSN: 3107-8494, Vol. 3, No. 1, January - June 2026

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From the conceptual framework of Vedic Humanism, the economy revolves around non-hoarding (aparigraha) and charitable giving (dāna) as the engines of social justice. Vedic principles of contentment (saṃtoṣa) offer a psychological antidote and embrace the economy of need, value and balance instead of greed, competition, and an inflated desire. In corporate and technological ethics, the principle of non-violence or ahimsā can be interpreted as non-violation of human and ecological integrity, and applying restraint in the use of artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and surveillance. In the realm of education, Vedic Humanism advocates for a merge of ethical literacy and scientific literacy, so that the tools of knowledge are used for moral ends, instead of for mere means. Several educational institutions in India and elsewhere offer programmes in Consciousness Studies and Yoga Psychology. These are the direct descendants of Vedic epistemology and represent the early stages of developing post-material humanism—integrating the mind and body as interconnected.

The most pressing concern surrounding the application of Vedic ethics is the possible reconstruction of global governance using Dharma-based multilateralism. If the national interest is a legitimate interest of the whole, then Lokasaṅgraha — the upholding of the world-balance — is the supreme metric. Vedic Humanism allows for the philosophy of a world citizen to emerge, which promotes unity through responsibility as opposed to unity through uniformity. India's articulation of the G20 (2023) theme as Vasudhaiva Kuṭumbakam is a demonstration of how contemporary diplomacy can be informed by ancient cosmopolitanism. Dharma-based intercultural dialogues shift the focus from hegemonic solidarity to cooperative sovereignty as opposed to imperial universalism. Similarly, Gandhi's reworking of Dayananda's non-violence as Satyāgraha has become a model for the human rights marches from South Africa to Europe.

When the politics of revenge and control are supplanted with truth and compassion, global ethics will have attained its Vedic ideal — governance as Yajna, and policy as service to life.

Vedic Humanism, while promising, has numerous philosophical and practical hurdles that need to be addressed to situate it in contemporary global ethics. The first challenge is interpretative plurality. The Vedic tradition is itself polyphonic and includes, for example, ritualist, monistic and theistic strands. Which of these is to be taken as the 'universal message'? A restrictive reading can descend into cultural parochialism, while an unrestrained inclusive reading is likely to remove the spiritual content altogether. As such, Vedic humanism as global ethics must, and will need to, continually articulate itself primarily through the medium of dialogue rather than through restatements of positions. For Vedic humanism to work in global ethics, it must be universal in the sense of being open to constant re-articulations and re-interpretations. Building on Dayananda and Vivekananda, contemporary scholars assert that the hallmark of true Vedic application is reason (yukti) and not blind faith. As such, Dharma for Vedic humanism to be applicable must be a justice-framework that is dynamic, i.e., flexible in its means, but firm in its ends. Most importantly, for Vedic ethics to be taken seriously as a field of study and not religious dogmatism, it will need to adopt the epistemic humility described above, especially if it is to address secular audiences.

Additionally, there are psychological and educational challenges. The current psyche, conditioned to think along quantitative and competitive lines, struggles with behavioral integration of abstract and lofty concepts. The Vedic system is based on voluntary compliance, not on legal enforcement. The challenge is to create educational systems that enable the knowledge of the oneness of the cosmos to not just be an abstract concept, but something that is personally integrated. The inclusion of self-reflective practices, meditation, and the study of ethics in the proposed curriculum will create leaders of the future with strong moral values. This is the experiential dimension that will keep Vedic Humanism from merely being a slogan. The expansion of technology brings with it new challenges, especially ethical ones. The age of digital technology has brought about great connectedness, but it has also increased isolation. A dharmic response calls for a digital code of ethics that embraces the disciplined and restrained use of data and attention, translating the ancient principles of self-restraint into a new form of cyber ethics. If the inner self is polluted by excessive stimulation, no external mechanism will promote ethical behavior in society. Global humanism must relearn the yogic principles of measure and moderation.

The most fundamental challenge of applying spiritual principles to multiple civilizations is the geopolitics of Vedic humanism. Differing from religious pluralism, Vedic humanism neither assimilates nor is expansionist. However, because of its Indian lineage, it can be perceived as a manifestation of

cultural imperialism. The answer to this is the humility of the dialogic example. If India can show ethical governance, it will influence other nations.

To sum up the broad ideas of Vedic locations and Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Vedic Humanism emphasizes compassion, self-restraint, and truth, and posits that all beings are divinely, and consequently, equally, rationally, and spiritually, integrated. Vedic Humanism establishes a universal code of ethics that integrates the spirit of rational inquiry and divinity of all beings equally. Its moral realism and ecological vision are manifestations of humane and sustainable globalization. `Dharma' the belief that universal moral law is a reworked version of an ancient faith, and is rationally just, and transcends all. When Dayananda reinterpreted Vedic ethics, he removed ritual exclusivism and the `faith` became reason, and the duty, and the service. Multiculturalism and Ethical Pluralism extend these insights to the other, showing that, the dialogue, not relativism, will guarantee the coexistence of society. His idea of `constructive pluralism` (freedom disciplined by truth) is a preform of ethics of modern democracy. Lastly, Vedic Humanism and Global Ethics examines the emerging and current problems, and the environmental problems, dehumanization through technology, and moral fragmentation. The enduring message of India to the World is Ethical Universality without any dogma, The reason and the reverence fused together, and the progress guided by Dharma for all beings' welfare.

8. CONCLUSION :

The ethical dilemmas of multicultural societies demand frameworks that uphold universal moral principles while respecting cultural diversity. Maharishi Dayananda Saraswati's philosophy of Vedic Humanism offers such a framework by grounding ethics in reason, equality, and moral responsibility rather than dogma or identity. His reinterpretation of dharma as ethical conduct applicable to all humanity transcends sectarian boundaries and aligns with modern democratic and human rights ideals. Dayananda's rejection of birth-based hierarchy and superstition strengthens social cohesion by affirming equal human dignity. His emphasis on education and rational inquiry equips individuals to engage ethically with difference rather than retreat into cultural isolation. Unlike relativistic approaches that weaken moral accountability, Vedic Humanism provides objective ethical standards while remaining adaptable across cultural contexts.

Dayananda's ideas are important in talks about global ethics. Dayananda's thinking begins with daily life around us and reaches people across the world. Dayananda's ideas have a spiritual side and make sense to many. Dayananda's thinking comes from tradition but looks for change. His philosophy tells people to talk to each other and not try to control anyone. His philosophy says people should do what is right.

This study concludes that Dayananda Saraswati's Vedic Humanism is not a historical curiosity but a living ethical resource. Its relevance to multicultural societies lies in its capacity to harmonize diversity with shared moral purpose. As global societies search for ethical coherence amid pluralism, Dayananda's thought offers a compelling model for inclusive, reasoned, and humane global ethics.

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